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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon his experience as a white man who "changed his pigmentation" and lived the life of a black man, the author attempts "to put you in another man's mind" and apply his experience to today's events. In addition, he seeks to show that there is a wide gap between intellectual acceptance of equality and real emotional acceptance. This gap perpetuates what he calls "the system" and explains in part the increased militancy of the black man in America today. (Author/DM)

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RACIAL EQUALITY:
THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

by

John Howard Griffin

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INTRODUCTION

In conjunction with its recent conference on equal employment opportunity, the Center for Labor and Management invited the noted author and lecturer, John Howard Griffin, to address the program participants on racial discrimination. In response to considerable interest in his remarks, the Center obtained permission to publish this edited version of the tape of Mr. Griffin's speech.

Drawing upon his experiences as a white man who changed his pigmentation and lived the life of a black man, Mr. Griffin speaks of the experiences that formed the basis of his book and the subsequent motion picture, *Black Like Me*. He attempts, as he states it, "to put you in another man's mind" and apply his experience to today's events.

In addition, he seeks to show that there is a wide gap between intellectual acceptance of equality and real emotional acceptance. This gap perpetuates what he calls "the system" and explains in part the increased militancy of the black man in America today.

A special note of thanks is extended to Mr. Griffin for his permission to publish these remarks; to Mr. Charles W. Toney, who arranged to have Mr. Griffin speak at The University of Iowa; to Dr. Don R. Sheriff and Mrs. Mona Lepic, of the Center for Labor and Management, and Professor Edith Ennis, of the College of Business Administration, for their editorial assistance.

Thomas P. Gilroy
Program Director
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RACIAL EQUALITY:

THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

At the time I completed the research and writing for *Black Like Me,* I fully expected to turn my attention to other matters, leaving this area to the behavioral scientists. I found that I could not do this. The aftermath of this experience had placed me in a very peculiar situation; I had become a person who could function in both black and white communities. Also, the intervening years have constantly called me back to this problem. A great deal of time has been involved in setting up communications between black and white leadership in various communities and businesses. A great deal of it has been involved in doing something that hopefully will supplement the Kerner Report.

Over the last seven years I have spent a large portion of my time living and doing research in the black areas, the ghettos. Particularly in the last year, prior to the assassination of Martin Luther King, I was being called in by the most militant groups to sit in on meetings. I came into these meetings as what is called an ex-black man. It was a very peculiar role in which I had been cast. It was a role that was enormously frustrating because what I perceived—and this may be a delusion on my part—has been a degeneration of very basic communications.

For example, in the last year we have heard black men become more and more outspoken. We've sat at conference tables where I have had the profound personal humiliation of sitting in the presence of the black man and the white man, realizing that almost any black man sitting at that table has to know infinitely more than I do, and express infinitely better than I could, the kinds of things that, sadly enough, still tend to give offense if a black man says them. I am frequently in conferences where black men, who formerly would tend to remain silent—because usually it was the white man who led the dialogue, if you can call it that, since it was really a false dialogue—would say, "We've got to have our manhood. We've got to have our dignity." I know that the white man sitting there—and I'm not impugning anyone's sincerity—sees a virile image. He doesn't really have the faintest idea of what the black man means when he cries out for his manhood. The tragedy of this situation is that we have not basically communicated.

What I would like to do today is discuss with you some things that are

terribly basic. I think that what I am going to say can be applied to most relations between almost any two cultures and any two ethnic groups. I will try to show you how this duality of viewpoint serves as an impairment to communication to the great discomfort and confusion of everyone concerned. I would like to try to implant some experience, to make some of the things we are saying mean the same things to a man whether he is white or black.

A Duality of Viewpoint

For a number of years now we have been doing a certain amount of investigation into equal employment opportunities. We did a study on the West Coast not too long ago where I would meet with management and have them tell me that they have eliminated all discrimination in employment. The important part about this is that they were telling the truth. Yet they indicated that they can't get qualified black men and can't get them to stay when they do come. We investigated perhaps 500 cases where we were finding this kind of pattern.

We were finding a pattern where, indeed, black men could get employment but where at the peer level there was a certain refusal to show the ropes. The employee was not being given the kind of help needed at the level of his peers. Then the work would be piled on him, and in disgust he would leave. I recall one of the cases we investigated dealing with a black man who went into a hospital to do medical filing and simply was not shown the kind of filing setup that was involved. As a result he continued to bungle. He continued to be handed assignments he could not do because of the refusal of help at the peer level.

Despite this, if you talked with businessmen, if you were involved in any kind of consultation with them, you would be told quite sincerely, "We do not permit any kind of discriminatory practice in hiring." But then if you went into the black area, you would find an already developed cynicism, with the black man saying, "It doesn't do any good to apply for any of those jobs. They'll give them to you now, but they'll make sure you can't make it on them."

So you have this tremendous duality of viewpoint which today has reached a dangerous point. One of the ironies of this kind of situation has been that information seldom has been communicated. When the gap is bridged and the black man does speak openly, this comes as a great shock to most white men who feel that at least they are making the effort. I'm sure I'm talking about your own experience and confusion. You say: "What is it? What do they really want?" So I would like to talk about this duality of viewpoint, its sources, and how we judge its authenticity. I am going to

say some things that may seem irrelevant, but I hope they will serve as a background.

There are some basic things to be taken into consideration. One represents a private kind of drama for me. I find that many people, for example, were offended by that section of the Kerner Report which says the problem is basically one of white racism. Many people refuse to believe this. I find, again, that part of the duality of viewpoint is that men cannot accept this. A new concept has been hurled at them. For example, witness some of the black caucuses on religion where blacks have come out and said that the churches in this country are white racist institutions. We see a tremendous reaction toward rejection of statements of this kind.

It is very difficult for the white man to see how, to a black man, society is permeated with a kind of thinking which to him is not even thinking. Men can think right through the kind of social structure in which we have been formed. We tend to express in attitudes what we call the silent language, which very frequently tells a black man eloquently what you don't know you are telling him. I want to see if we can find out how we have come to this state of affairs.

One thing we can take as a kind of anthropological first principle, universal everywhere I have been: Members of any culture have a profound tendency to regard members of any other culture as simply underdeveloped versions of themselves. This is a tremendous key, and we encounter it incessantly. I think it is important to see how we develop this tendency.

I am going to talk to you a little bit about our formation in the South, where we have great difficulties. I know we are not in the South here, but when you look at immigration these patterns hold very much outside the South. We have lived under two massive delusions in this land. First is the delusion of the southern white man, who claims to know and understand everything about what is patronizingly called "our Negroes." My experience was a profoundly shocking one. I discovered within minutes after I became black that what the white man thought of the black man in no way corresponded with the way we black people were living.

The second major delusion, which was enormously frustrating for a few years, was: In nonsouthern areas it was "not like that here." I went into community after community across this land and talked about this duality of viewpoint. I would talk about the early spiritual death of not only the black child but the white child brought up in a racist society. I would be very warmly received. Then, after an appearance, some man—usually someone important in the local power structure—would come up to me, shake my hand, and say, "It has been a very wonderful experience to hear you, and it is marvelous to hear these principles being clarified again." I would

always wait, and he would add that inevitable word, "but," and then: "Of course we have a different situation here." Traveling across this country and around the world, I began to have the terrible feeling that we had become a nation of quite sincere individuals who considered ourselves the exceptions to the very principles that we were espousing and applauding.

Certainly in the South we can see fairly clearly that our delusion came at early levels of experience. Most of us in the South had similar kinds of formation—particularly those of my generation. I might add, based on my correspondence with a young twenty-five-year-old ex-Klansman and his experience, that the environment of his generation parallels my own and that of many southern white men.

I think it comes basically from the fact that small children in the deep South were allowed to play quite freely with black children. Basically, great numbers of us had the experience of being reared with the help of a black lady. As small children we had the delusion that we loved that lady better than almost anyone we knew. Then when we reached a certain age—it was young, six, seven, maybe eight at the latest—society did this thing to us, which we now know was a terrible thing. When we reached that age, society told us the time had come when we must alter those relationships, when we must stop playing with black children. I remember my Georgia grandmother telling me I was getting too old to come in and sit on the lap of the lady who had taken care of all my intimate needs since I was born—the black lady. I remember being warned as a child not to embarrass the family when company came by asking why this lady did not have supper in the kitchen with the children, as was customary. Why didn't she sit at our table after we reached a certain age? We were held in the delusion of goodness by being told repeatedly what we now know as one of the great lies of history. We were told that black people preferred it this way, that it would be an embarrassment if we acted any other way. We were also told of the things that sustained the delusion, that only the trash would be responsible for any cruelty or injustice to a fellow human being. Since this was told to us by good people—our parents, our grandparents—we didn't question it.

The ultimate effect of this was twofold. All of this combined to give us the conviction at emotional levels that fellow human beings were intrinsically different and intrinsically "other." We grew up thinking that black people had different needs, different aspirations, different responses to stimuli, different sources of joy. Somehow, in every culture that I have ever experienced, I have found this idea of the intrinsic "otherness" of men inculcated early in life. The direct effect of this, the criminality of this, has been that we have inculcated in children, early in life, a false and distorted view of what man is. Great numbers of us grew up thinking that we were in the old

days what one called "the liberated white southerner"—that nonprejudiced white southerner. Some of us have discovered, from one kind of shock or another, that no matter how lovingly, how benignly we were raised, simply to mature in a society which maintains that color makes a man intrinsically different is to accept a kind of permissive suppression of fellow human beings. We discovered a thing that black men knew a long, long time ago: We ended up being tainted, distorted ourselves, in ways that we never dreamed.

Blaming the Victim

I had a hint of these delusions when I was sent to school in France in my very early teens. In France we sat in classrooms with fellow students who were more densely pigmented; in those days we called anyone densely pigmented a Negro. As a product of the kind of culture I described previously, I was delighted, because we always maintained the memory of what we thought were deeply affectionate relationships with human individuals who happened to be black. Well, I wrote to my parents how happy I was to sit in a classroom with black men. My parents, to show you how complete the delusion was, wrote back how delighted they were that I was having an experience I had never had before. Yet the very first time I went to a public eating place with a fellow white student, one of the same black students came in, took a table across the room, and I found myself reacting according to my formation. Pushing my chair slightly back from the table, I asked my fellow white student, "Do you allow them to eat in the same room with us?" He hurled a question at me: "Why not?" I realized with an immediate sense of horror that in all my life I had never heard that question asked. I had never heard it asked in any church; I had never heard it asked in any school; and—far more terribly—the question had never even suggested itself to my conscious mind. I was acting according to deeply ingrained learned behavior patterns that had been fed to me with my mother's milk. To think that while we were involved in the practice of racism, I would still have denied it, as we have denied it up until today! We were witnessing racism in all its clarity and all its starkness.

Those were the days of the rise of Hitler. The students of France were very close to this race situation and enormously preoccupied with it. I didn't realize that racism has certain fundamental patterns. I didn't even realize it when I heard coming from Nazi Germany the kind of terms I had heard all my life as a southern white lad. We heard the Nazis speaking of their race problem, for example, and their Jewish problem just as we have always spoken of our race problem and our "Negro problem."

To us, from the perspective of another country, it was very clear that Nazi Germany was not afflicted in the proper sense of these terms with even the

race problem or a Jewish problem but that she was profoundly afflicted with the problem of racism. We heard another first principle of racism: You always blame the victim. The Jew was blamed for everything that happened to him, even his own annihilation in Germany. I needn't tell you that one of the deeply alienating and frustrating things that we are experiencing in this country today is that same unconscious pattern. You don't have to do more than pick up yesterday's paper to find that we are still profoundly involved in essentially a white man's interpretation of the news, which always manages to work it around so that we blame the victim.

One of the maddening things is to go inside the ghetto and witness on television and in the other media an interpretation of the things that build ghettos. That is utter distortion of what we are seeing and hearing. Again, you keep hearing that first principle—at least I keep hearing it in my own mind—how we blame the victim.

I began to have a little hint of what this is all about. One night, when I was in France, I became involved in smuggling Jewish families out of Germany through France to England. We had little experience, little knowledge, little know-how. We hadn't learned to forge papers, and it had become necessary now to have safe-conduct papers to move any adult more than a few blocks in any direction. This night I had to go into rooms in cheap little boarding houses where we had hidden the Jewish parents and their children we had managed to bring out of Germany. I had to perform what for a young man was a very sad mission, to tell the parents that we were not going to succeed, that we had managed to bring them that far, but we were unable to bring them any farther. When I went into these rooms I didn't have to tell them—they knew. They told me they knew it was all over for them. They knew that as soon as the Nazis moved in, the first thing they would do was round them up, ship them back to Germany, and put them in a concentration camp. Then they asked me to do a terrible thing. They asked me to take their children from them, because we could move children under the age of fifteen without any kind of papers.

Suddenly, sitting in those rooms, I saw a pattern occurring that I would like to share with you because it occurs in rooms in this country constantly. Again, I think it is basic in dealing with this duality of viewpoint. As students living in the country next to Germany, we had been obsessively interested and had been fascinated by this whole problem of racism. We discussed it endlessly. We discussed it in its pros and its cons. This night, sitting in those rooms with the doors closed and the windows closed and shuttered, it soon began to dawn on me: I was aware of the fact that I was sitting in the presence of massive human tragedy. I was aware of the fact that I was sitting in the presence of parents who loved their children, who had little illusion that they would ever see their children again. They were

giving away their children to a virtual stranger so that at least the children would escape the camp. Suddenly a great deal of our intellectual preoccupation with racism in the abstract seemed completely irrelevant.

Then there was that second realization that was a part of my living in this country. It was a realization that night that this was reality, but that I could go ouside of those rooms, that I could go a few blocks in any direction, and could find most men—perfectly decent men—who, never sitting in those rooms, were even then quibbling, rationalizing, justifying the very racism that led to the tragedy in those rooms.

This was all particularly clear and sharp in those days before the fall of France. As men will, they knew that to be the friend of a Jew was to be in trouble. Men were, sadly enough, unloading their Jewish friendships and rationalizing this act. But I have often said I wish I could do one thing. I wish I could take any man with me into such rooms in this country where precisely the same thing occurs. I would like to make the point clear that we now can see blackness, not as any particularly density of pigment, but as an experience. It might be this: I don't care how privileged his past and his present, if the black man has lived the experience of blackness in this land, he views everything almost from the point of view of within that room. It doesn't matter which room it is because there are rooms like this everywhere.

I can recall a room in a farmhouse in Mississippi where I have sat many times. I sat in the presence of a black woman whose son I had known and respected. The son of tenant farm parents, his way out was to serve in the armed forces. He served ten years overseas, first in Germany, then Korea, saving every dime he had. He used that money to buy farm land to get his parents off that tenant land. When he came back to this country he had no intention of going South, so he went to the University of Chicago, where he made a spectacular record as a classical scholar. Then his father had a stroke and he was called back to this farm, which now was considerable property. His father died, and he was left with the sole care of the property and his mother. He built it up. Then he sought one of the rights which he spent ten years fighting overseas to preserve: To complete his education, to get his last year of schooling. For this he was lynched, and he was lynched in frightful slow mockery. I was in the room with him at the time of his death. This great man said, "I would be glad it happened if it only showed men where this system leads. They will never know, will they?" Then he said this terribly important thing: "Be sure and tell them that this thing that happened to me is less terrible than what this system did to the men who did this to me. It turned them into beasts, and it will surely turn their children into beasts."

With each dehumanization, you see a society that allows itself to view

fellow human beings as intrinsically "other," a thing that black men have understood, a thing that I have never known how we could fail to understand. I think of those of us in the South, who saw the dehumanization in front of our eyes, of little children who play at the age of five in their little cut-down Klan uniforms, who at the age of seventeen or eighteen join the Klans, and who become the dehumanized ones. I sat in that room, and I sit in the room of his mother today, and I look on the face of a mother who lives with the grief of her son's martyrdom. I know that the pattern is identical, that I am in a room where massive human tragedy has occurred. I know that I can go outside that room, and I can go a city block in any direction, and I can find men—most men perfectly decent—who have no awareness of this kind of reality, who go on quibbling, rationalizing, justifying the racism that leads to this kind of tragedy.

Beyond the South

It is not only in rooms in the South where young man have been killed. It is quite particularly, and quite more obscurely, rooms in the great ghettos of this land where I have sat with parents. I think of the ghettos of St. Louis, where in a couple of city blocks six thousand human souls are crowded. When the parents discuss this kind of thing, they say, "What can we do? We can't keep the children locked up in these two or three rooms. There is no amount of good parental influence that we can bring to bear that isn't nullified the minute we simply open the door and let the children go downstairs and play in an area where six thousand Negroes are crowded into a city block, where a child has not had the kind of privacy that would allow him to escape hearing the destructive despair of the parents." This is the thing, you see, which I am not sure we can really understand, that we can know, because it is overwhelming.

I have as one of my colleagues a thirty-four-year-old black man who is greatly gifted as an artist. When he went to school, his drawings were torn up in front of the class by a teacher who told him to get rid of that kind of an idea, because there has never been a black artist who has made it. So this young man, a man of great potential, developed along the lines of his only hero—that well-known street character, that street character with "class," the street character with money. By the time he was twelve, he was pushing dope. From the time he was fourteen until he was thirty-four years of age, he was in and out of narcotics institutions and prisons. He became king of the street. When he came out of the hospital last year, he came out hating everything that was white. There was a show of his paintings, and quite by accident, my wife went to see it. She bought a painting. I saw it and was overwhelmed by this man's gift, so I went and bought two more. Since I was behind in my work, I asked him if he could come and help me.

I said if I got a white secretary, I would have to train her for five years to really understand the nature of my work. He came, and then he went and got drunk for a week. He couldn't stand it. His strength was in his hatred of everything white. He told me that in all his years this was the first time he had ever been in a decent home, and he couldn't stand it. You see, what the black parent knows, and has known all this time, is this pattern—the destruction of the black child very, very early.

So in those rooms, as every parent knows, as long as that kind of system goes on, the child is being murdered psychologically, spiritually, intellectually, with the damage coming very early. From those places we can go outside a few blocks in any direction and find men—mostly decent men—who know nothing about this kind of reality because it is utterly disconnected with their lives in general, who go right on quibbling, rationalizing, justifying the racism that leads to the tragedy in those rooms. Today, even for you gentlemen, I have to cite this kind of an illustration to a point of total nausea, because a great deal of what we can realize intellectually we do not realize at the emotional level.

One of the things that is disheartening to me is that I will be taken into cities to do studies of ghetto problems. I will be given a briefing by men who are honest, trained social scientists and sociologists. Then I will go and live in the black community. I will usually not need much briefing there, but very frequently I am given a briefing by a black social scientist. I have yet to be in a city where the picture I am given of community problems by the white social scientist and the white community leadership in any way coincides with the picture I get from the black social scientist and from living in the black ghetto. This is not a deliberate thing, but there is always, in every city I know, this enormous discrepancy that we have to bridge. Part of the experience of blackness is that it doesn't matter whether the black man has actually lived the same identical experience; part of the experience of blackness is that black men know all these neuroses.

I was asked to lecture at a southwestern university a few weeks back. I went there thinking that I was going to be preceded by Dick Gregory. When I got there, to the students' great anger and mine, I discovered that the administration had canceled Gregory because they said they didn't want a radical on campus. They canceled him because they said he was jailed in Chicago. I sat there and told the men who had engaged me that I couldn't speak. I said I wouldn't speak on a campus where they know so little about this situation that they can think of Dick Gregory as being an extremist. Eventually I did speak. I went ahead and gave his lecture instead of mine, because I know his lecture as well as I know mine. Afterwards, I apologized to the students for what the administration had done. I told them, "Since you were deprived of his lecture, and since he is infinitely superior

to me in this area, I gave you his lecture instead of mine, so you have applauded him." The administration then came out in the time left and said they appreciated my courtesy and my frankness. They agreed with me that today—and this was only a few weeks back—in an academic setting the theories of Martin Luther King could properly be presented at the campus level. Well, it is absolutely staggering that a few weeks ago this place of learning could finally decide that the time has come to present the theories of Martin Luther King. Those theories have been lost in the mists for five or six years, and it is a tragic thing that this should be so.

The conclusion I am coming to is this: For twenty years we have seen this kind of racism alive in Germany, knowing that the patterns are the same. The only difference is the group being victimized. As a result of my experiences and studies, I came to an awful awareness: We were seeing in this country—I couldn't accuse any man of being insincere—the denial of the fact that we are still involved in the practice of racism, which means simply drawing up an indictment against a whole people. We still claim in this country that we judge every man by his qualities as a human individual, and we believe it. That is the tragic part of it. I do not believe it any more.

In 1959 I was asked to do a study dealing with the rise of the suicide rate among black men in the deep South. I accepted this, thinking I could do it easily. I said I would question southern white men southern black men, and do a good cross section. I won't say what the questionnaires from the white men showed, because it was not too interesting. Of those questionnaires that were sent to black men, very few were returned. Those that were returned were returned blank. But there were covering letters of explanation, and these letters said, "No, Mr. Griffin, we don't answer this kind of questionnaire any more. We have answered them in the past, but we won't answer them any more." For the first time a term was used that was to hit me in the face a thousand times afterward. They said, "You probably can't help it, Mr. Griffin, but you think white, in counterdistinction to thinking human." They said, "We don't think it is possible for the white man, even if he is trained in the sciences, to interpret this data without thinking white and thereby falsifying his conclusion."

You didn't have to look very far to realize the validity of this objection. In cities all over this land we took perfectly valid sociological data and interpreted it in white to the great detriment of truth. Of course, on two or three of these "black" questionnaires was scribbled the kind of challenge that black men have hurled to white men for generations. The challenge read something like this: "The only way someone like you could ever hope to understand anything of what this is all about is that some morning you could wake up in my skin." How often we have heard this and how little we have believed it! I didn't believe it because I was brought up in the

South, and these things stay in your bones, stay in your marrow. I thought that we southern white men did know, did understand. Secondly, I didn't believe it because I had been involved in studies of racism for twenty years.

On Becoming Black

I decided somebody had better do this thing. Somebody had better do this thing for a quite childish reason, because I was now convinced that this was the only way to show men the absurdity of judging a man by pigment, drawing up an indictment against a whole people. We knew that it wasn't simply a question of the trash any more. You couldn't blame any of this on the trash alone. No, what we knew was that prejudice existed on an irrational level and that we had men who couldn't conceivably be considered trash, in the North, in the South, in every country that I have ever visited, who could reason superbly in every aspect of their existence except this one aspect of a deeply imbedded prejudice. When we approach them on this one subject, they tend to respond irrationally, impervious to scientific data. So it seemed that one of us had better do this thing. I felt if one of us could do it and then share whatever happened at the level of actual experience, some clarification might come that was obviously not coming at the level of pure reason. Basically this is what led me to this experiment.

I went to New Orleans and contacted a dermatologist. I went through a series of treatments that would give me a pigment that wouldn't wear off or wash off. During the time of these treatments I was setting up the criteria for this study. The one thing I wanted to know was: Do we judge men by their color or as human individuals as we claim we do and as we think we do? Are we involved in the practice of racism? Because if we are, we know that the total community is damaged, not just the victim group. So I decided I would change nothing about myself except the pigment and shave my head. I decided I would keep my name, my speech patterns, my clothing, my background, my credentials; I would answer every question ever asked me truthfully. If it is true, in fact, as we claim, that we judge men by their qualities as human individuals, since I was precisely the same human individual, then my life as a black John Griffin shouldn't differ drastically from the life I had always known as the white John Griffin. If, on the other hand, we are involved in looking upon men, seeing pigment, drawing up an indictment against a whole people, considering such men as intrinsically other, then—since I had that pigment—my life as a black John Griffin would differ in ways that I couldn't anticipate. Only I know now how little I could anticipate it!

That first night was one of great revelation. I went out and made my transition after dark. Within thirty minutes I had to change everything about this experiment. In thirty minutes I had encountered my first white

man, a middle-aged white man. I asked him where would be the nearest place for me to find a room. He didn't know. We whites seldom know this kind of detail. But he handled me with great courtesy, and he indicated that part of town that was set aside for us. I watched him very closely. He didn't show the slightest suspicion about my identity, so it was all right. I then encountered, one after another, two black men, mature men. I asked each the same question: "Where would I go to look for a room?" They, of course, knew. They indicated the choice of one or two possible hotels in the immediate area. To my complete amazement, neither of them showed the slightest flicker of suspicion about my identity. This altered everything, because, you see, I was still thinking white.

I had never anticipated for one moment that I would pass as a black man in the black community. The reasons I thought it would be impossible are explained by the fact that a deeply held prejudice will cause even the senses to accommodate themselves to the image you see. I had no intention of attempting to pass as a black man; I only intended to explain to black men that I was involved in a sociological experiment. The reason I thought I would not pass was that I don't have the kind of bone structure, facial conformation, or color of eyes that we think of as negroid. I now wonder what we have been using for sight all these years, particularly those of us who live in the South, claiming to be in constant contact with black men. I didn't have to be in the black community an hour before the truth struck me. At the age of forty, I saw it for the first time. The truth was that I was encountering black men who had every type of bone structure, every type of facial conformation, every density of pigmentation from black to so light that it can't be perceived. I encountered black men with blue eyes, gray eyes, green eyes. You see, this is a part of blackness, all the things we whites haven't begun to face in this land.

Another of these facts concerns the white man's contribution to the black's way of life. If you think that is a tactless remark, believe me I have never been in a black family's home or lived in a family where there were black men who didn't discuss quite freely, quite frankly, where the white blood came from. Whose mother? Whose grandmother? Whose great grandmother? Conservative estimates tell us that at least 75 per cent of black men in this country have white antecedents. New sociological data are claiming a much higher percentage. But we don't see it. Our eyes accommodate themselves to this stereotype.

Recently I was lecturing at the University of Washington. I was introduced by a black lady anthropologist with the clearest, grayest, most luminous eyes I have ever seen. The audience saw her. I didn't talk about this kind of thing, but after I spoke I was standing backstage speaking to this lady doctor. I was wearing very heavy lenses due to some eye difficulty. A

white lady came up to me and said, "Mr. Griffin, would you mind lowering your glasses?" I said, "No, I don't mind." She looked into my eyes and said, "Now how could you possibly pass when you don't have black eyes?" I replied, "Pardon me, have you met doctor so and so?" I introduced her to the black lady anthropologist with clear gray eyes. She looked right into those eyes, shook her hand, and never got the point. She turned right around and pursued that same question with me. This happens all the time.

The second reason I was certain I couldn't pass as black is one that I am even more ashamed to admit today. Yet I am asked this every day of my life by southern men, too: What did I do about my voice? What did I do about my speech patterns? One of the reasons I thought I could not pass, and didn't intend to try it, was because I didn't know how to speak Negro. A massively held illusion all over the world is that unless you sound like you are reading Uncle Remus, you couldn't have an authentic black dialect. But I don't know what we are using for ears. You don't have to be in the black world five minutes to perceive that there isn't any speech pattern. There is another side to that coin, too. While I was teaching in a college about a year ago, one of the young black lady students in my class jokingly let slip one of the old southern colloquialisms. Another student next to me, also a black young lady, before she could control the spontaneous reaction, punched me in the ribs and said, "There she goes, talking like white trash again!"

Two weeks ago I participated in a week-long seminar for school administrators. I was introduced by the assistant to the superintendent of schools. She was a black lady. She introduced me, using perfect English. Afterward, one of the administrators came to her office and said, "I am a little bit embarrassed. I didn't want to ask this out there because I didn't want to embarrass Mr. Griffin, but how could he possibly pass as a black man when he doesn't have the faintest sign of a dialect?" She looked at him straight in the face, and I am sure in a voice consumed in disgust, said, "I suppose he managed the same way I do."

The important part here—the thing that drives black men mad—is really worth remembering. It is that we do have profoundly ingrained stereotyped ideas. It is one of the mysteries of my experience almost daily that men who don't want to be prejudiced, who don't think they are prejudiced, still show me—as these illustrations have indicated—that our senses of sight and hearing can accommodate themselves to these prejudices. What I discovered, which was a great initial shock to me, was that in this land all you had to do was to be pigmented and you were a black man. You were a black man wherever you went. There was the step-over, at that point, into a world that almost fractured my mind with the duality that we will pursue.

There are several points that I want to make. I would like to show how in

our existence some of the duality of viewpoint becomes almost incomprehensible. The very first night I went to one of those hotels and took a room which was the best available. It is not important to talk about the comforts and discomforts because these are minor things, but I began to face this thing. I sat down on the bed and looked at myself in the mirror. I saw in that mirror a black face. I began to come to the realization that I was in a city that I knew very well. I had been there many times in the past. I had been there on lecture tours. I had been there on concert tours. Always in the past I had come into that city as an honored guest. I had been entertained in homes. I had been put up in first-class hotels. I had been entertained in world-famous restaurants. Tonight I found myself sitting in a tiny coffin-like room with thin walls, with no sign of a window. I knew I was the same man—same name, same clothing, same background, same aspirations. Everything about me was exactly the same, except I now had a pigment that I didn't have before. I knew very well that all the money, all the prestige in the world, couldn't gain admittance to most of those homes, to a single one of those first-class hotels or restaurants where I had been received as the same human individual, where I had been received as an honored guest a few weeks prior to that time. I had to ask myself that key question: Was I being judged by my qualities as a human individual, or were men simply looking at me seeing my pigment, drawing up an indictment against a whole people?

In the next few weeks I looked for work. I realize that this is going to sound somewhat dated to you, though it is not actually that dated, and perhaps to a great many of you, irrelevant. But unless you realize the true experience of blackness—that no black man has escaped in his past, nor most in present life—only then can it make sense to you. I looked for work. I looked for it through the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. I would look for work in the same way in every place. I would go into a community and search the employment ads in the newspapers. Then I would telephone in answer to those employment want ads. I would say exactly the truth on the telephone. I would say, "This is John Griffin. I have just arrived in this community and I have seen your ad in the paper." Then I would give the qualifications that I had for that job. To be very realistic, I didn't seek unduly ambitious work. I sought work slightly above the level of a laborer. I gave authentic qualifications. I remember an ad wanting a doctor's assistant in a photographic laboratory. Well, I have owned my own photographic laboratories in Europe, in this country, and in Mexico for thirty years. I have some qualifications in this area. I would answer any kind of an ad that wanted typing done because as a writer I can type proficiently.

Well, in two instances the jobs had already been filled when I tele-

phoned, so we completely discount that. In every other instance my qualifications over the telephone were sufficiently interesting that the potential employer would ask me to come in for an interview or to fill out an application. In two instances I was asked to come in and go to work. I was hired on the telephone. In every instance when I appeared—and I appeared as I am dressed here—the job was no longer available. Sometimes I felt sorry for that poor young lady who was given the job of explaining that since I had called, one of the employer's cousins had just moved to town and without her knowledge they had given the job to that person. She was terribly, terribly sorry. Sometimes I was simply told that there was not any chance of getting any kind of employment here. In every single instance, whether politely or rudely, I was made to understand that the chances of my getting the kind of employment I sought were nil. I had to face the fact that there was no question that over the telephone I could have had a good portion of those jobs. There is no question but that the white John Griffin could earn some kind of a decent livelihood. Yet the moment I appeared and it was seen that I was black, I could not. Same man, same name, same qualifications. Again I had to constantly ask myself that key question: Was I being judged by my qualities as a human individual, or were men looking at me and drawing up an indictment against a whole people?

This became critically important because it has to do with motive, incentive, and a lot of things that you gentlemen as businessmen are considering now. Toward the end, every time I went to see a potential employer, internally I was begging him to do just one thing. I wonder if you know what that was. I wasn't begging him for the job, because it wasn't really that significant to me. What I was begging was: "Please ask me a question. Ask me just one question, then reject me because of my answer. Don't just go on looking at me and rejecting me on the basis of this pigment." When none did, I began to do something we have sometimes seen black men do. I began to stop calling. I began to stop answering the ads. One of the ironies of this type of situation is that I was learning at the age of forty what black men had learned at the age of seven or eight.

I began to do another thing, and this is important. I was trapped in my pigment, very deeply trapped in it. I couldn't depigment myself. So I began to bide the time. I began to look for a place where I could just sit, let the hours pass, where I wouldn't have to think too much about this kind of thing. When you have a problem and all of your reflection is not going to bring a solution to it, it becomes unbearable to think about it. Then one day I became aware of the fact that I was perpetuating a situation of basic injustice by doing this. It came one day when I was sitting on a doorstoop in Alabama, waiting, waiting for the hours to pass. I glanced up and my glance met that of a white man. He looked away and began to speak to

some fellow white men. I don't really know whether he even saw me. I don't know what he was saying, obviously, but a strange thing occurred. By just that exchange of glances, I began to see myself once again through the eyes of the white man. I immediately knew how I must look to him. I have always tried to find parallels. The white man's experience in this land leads us to build the kind of structure of understanding of why that black man ended up sitting there like that.

What we tend to do is draw on our own experience, which is obviously limited as all man's experience is limited. We see this thing not knowing the ultimate causes. We will use value judgments that make sense to us. I knew what those men were saying about me because I had said it all my life. I am sure that every man in this room has either said it or heard it said. They were saying something like this: "Look at that. Did you ever see such apathy? No wonder they can't get any place. If they'd just get out and work and struggle. Why don't they get themselves an education?" Somebody else would say, "No, he would rather sit there and do nothing and eat up my tax dollars in welfare funds. If I were a big strong-looking bull like that fellow, I would do something. I would dig ditches. I wouldn't just sit there."

It was then that I began to realize that the language we use stems from this duality of viewpoint. I am not impugning the white man's sincerity. What I do know is that the tragedy comes through in spite of the sincerity. Take the word "apathy," for example. It is not apathy when you knock on every door. It is not apathy when you have presented yourself. It is something else, but it is not apathy. Then I realized that it wasn't the things that the bigots said to us that were the most maddening to the black man. We knew how to handle that. But it was the things that the very best, the most sincere, the most concerned white men said to us that were ultimately the most maddening. Let me take this expression that we hear constantly—the statement that we should work and struggle to get ourselves an education. It is not the bigot who gives that kind of advice. It is the man who is really concerned. It is the man who is really sincere. It is the kind of advice I have always given, because it seems like logically good advice.

But let me show you how that sounded to us as black men. You see, we are always hearing this. It is the employer who is above any overt kind of bigotry. It is a priest, a nun, a teacher. And we will always have this whispered into our ears by the better elements of society—by what in the old days we used to call the "good black" or the "good white." They would say we should work, we should struggle, we should get ourselves ready, get ourselves an education. Then the voice would kind of trail off into silence. What did they think would happen if we did all these things? The implication that we got clearly was that if we did all of these things, if we worked, struggled, lifted ourselves up by our bootstraps, got ourselves an

education, we would somehow come into the light. We would somehow, to use a term that every black man loathes (and I will glory in the day when every citizen of this country loathes it), "earn" rights which no white man has to earn, which are guaranteed and protected for even the most degraded white-skinned man!

What the black man knows through the experience of blackness is that when men look at you and then judge you by pigment, when the very word "black" raises an unconscious stereotype, it doesn't really matter how much you have worked, how much you have struggled, how much you have lifted yourself up by your bootstraps, how many degrees you happen to have. I am convinced that it is massively believed in this land, even today, that as black men we were discriminated against in mathematic ratio to our educational or economic disadvantages. This is utterly untrue! Every black man knows it. In the state of Alabama I went until 8:30 at night before I found a place that would serve a black man breakfast. I know many black Ph.D.'s, and I know that if every single one of these men had been with me on that day, on that road, in that area, we would have all gone until 8:30 at night before we found a place that would serve a black man breakfast.

It was a black Ph.D. who taught me how to handle this. He taught me that in an area like this you make provision. If you are traveling, as I was, alone, the way you handled it was to go into a grocery store where you could buy things. You would buy yourself a little seventeen-cent box of cornstarch and carry it in your pocket. In that kind of a situation you take a little bit of it at a time, and it forms a kind of lotion in your stomach. It doesn't do any good, but it keeps the body preoccupation from becoming obsessive and bitter. The important thing was that it wasn't the physical part of it. It was the fact that I went into the store, put my money down, and I bought that wretched box because I was constantly being regarded as intrinsically "other." We had thought that the "white only" signs were significant, but the black men know, and have always known, that they weren't that important. They were a symbol. Men have taken them down, and it hasn't really altered anything. Black men of all descriptions still find that we are standing in front of those kinds of doors that never had a "white only" sign and that we stand there and hear the admonition that all you have to do is work, struggle, and get yourselves an education. But you are rejected from those very doors, and nobody asks you whether you have worked, struggled, or whether you have lifted yourself up by your bootstraps, even though you have.

I know it would be a kind of revelation to my audiences all over this land to realize that in almost every major city I know black men keep a kind of mental notebook. There are certain places about which white men never hear that don't have a good reputation in the black community. I met

a schoolteacher in Saginaw when I was teaching in an institute not long ago—a middle-aged, black schoolteacher—who said to me that she had been invited to go to lunch with a white schoolteacher. She accepted and when the white schoolteacher told her where they were going she began to get a little queasy, because this was one of those places that doesn't have a very good reputation. But she couldn't find any way of getting out of it so she went. To her great edification they were received very courteously. They were seated, waited on immediately, and the food was delicious. She marked in her mental notebook that this was a place that was all right. She then went back alone and found that she was again treated very courteously. She was seated and the waitress came immediately. In that particular chain of restaurants you couldn't keep a black person out, so if a black person came in, the rule was to wait on him immediately and get him out as fast as you can. She ordered her food, the omelet came, and she was feeling very good about this until she stuck the fork into the omelet. Normally customers season their own food, but she discovered that it was already so over-salted and over-peppered that she couldn't swallow it. She got the message, the kind of quiet message that exists every place in this land.

The same problem exists for quite distinguished persons. The president of a northern state education association was quite horrified a couple years ago when he invited a guest to come and speak. The guest was a black lady, and the president had made a reservation for her in a luxury motel. When he met her airplane and took her to the motel, this kind of game took place: The motel clerk could not find her reservation. So they called the manager, and the manager was profuse in his apology to her. He berated the clerk for this kind of inefficiency. He apologized again, but he said all rooms were taken. One gets the message. Very distinguished black men live this kind of private life. Not only in this country—it also happens in Europe. I could cite thousands of cases. This is the kind of thing that black men are encountering.

So the illusion again demonstrates the duality of viewpoint. I am not here to tell you horror stories. If these were isolated cases we could dismiss them. I think what few white men realize is that today in this land there is a simple, unconscious luxury that black men, no matter how distinguished, still do not enjoy. This is the luxury of knowing that in each new encounter the white man is not going to slip and unleash some thunderbolting attitude that he isn't even aware of, which indicates an essentially racist attitude. Having experienced this, I began to do what many black men do. I began to avoid whites and not necessarily the bad whites. It was not antipathy for the whites in those days, I promise you it wasn't. It was frequently interpreted as antipathy for the white man, but it wasn't. It was something like this. Today in almost every appearance that I make where

we have a question period, some white man who is not a conscious bigot will stand up in my audience. He will be a man who is sincerely troubled, sincerely concerned, but he will stand up and ask me a question that goes something like this: "Now, Mr. Griffin, is there some way of reversing the process?" When I hear these words, I know that every black man in that room is getting sick.

The implication here is that if we could find some way of depigmenting black men we would be involved in a kind of solution of the problem. The man asking that question hasn't the faintest idea of what a degrading point of view this indicates to a black man. The implication is that the burdens that we bore as black men were the burdens of our pigment. One of the reasons that some of us at least just stopped wanting contact with white men was because the black man knows that the burdens we bore were not the burdens of our black skins but the far more terrible burdens of the white man's seeming inability to see beyond those pigments, to see the human individual.

What I have found is that what we see is so strange to us as white men that we reject it, even when it is pointed out to us. I was called last year into a little northern town where there had been great hostility between Protestant and Catholic groups. A man who was a professor of Bible history in the local college got these two groups to invite me in for an appearance. I spoke about the humiliation of my having to say things that I can say because my pigment is now gone, but if a black man—no matter how distinguished—said the same things, he would be rejected. The lecture went very well. Afterward we had a reception for nineteen of the sponsors and a black man, an industrial psychologist in that community. The professor of Bible history was quite ecstatic that he had organized all this. He said that for the first time Protestants and Catholics had met together there. He felt it had been a glorious success and that it marked a turning point in the community. He turned to this black psychologist and said, "Don't you feel something about tonight? Don't you feel that this is a turning point in the history of our community?" And the black psychologist said this: "Well, frankly, I am not too excited." The professor of Bible history said, "What on earth are you talking about?" And the psychologist replied, "Well, I have a very fine job in your community, and I work at a position in keeping with my training and background. But I must live in a town twenty miles away because I cannot buy, rent, or in any other way procure a home for my family in the town where I work, although I apparently have the respect of the community. I can't get too excited about this kind of thing." And then the professor of Bible history responded in this way: "If you are going to be that cynical about it, I can't see how you can expect us to do anything about it." And the conversation began to degenerate. It was fascinating to

watch, because I had analyzed this in my speech that evening. Someone said, "I knew there would be trouble inviting that Negro here." When I saw that things had degenerated sufficiently, I stepped in and said, "Now isn't this extraordinary. You gave me a standing ovation for saying less well what you are now ready to tear this man's heart out for saying because he happens to be black." This, again, is the kind of thing that is overwhelming for the black man to experience. It is, again, a part of the kind of duality of viewpoint which keeps us on edge in our relations with one another.

The System

Finally, I want to try to show you the cumulative effect of this, which is, again, part of the black experience. It hearkens back to two things: 1) To what in the black world we call the "system," and 2) to this idea of the intrinsic "other" which is so deeply imbedded in us. What we mean by the system in the black world is, simply, a complex of things. I am going to oversimplify it. We only need to know what the term means as black men understand it. It means a complex of customs and traditions that have been handed down for generations. These are the learned behavior patterns that are inculcated in us from birth. They are so deeply inculcated that we tend to call them human nature, which they are not at all, plus local discriminatory ordinances that make up the complex of what, in the black world, we call the system. This system is extraordinary in what it told us black men about ourselves. First, the system said, as black men we were citizens of this country. As such, we should pay our taxes, and we should defend our country against its enemies. That part of it is beautiful. No one could ask for anything better. However, when you are black in this society, you hesitate because always the majority will say this good thing, and then it will use this qualifying term "but."

I was speaking at a conference a couple years ago, and one of the participants, a clergyman, asked me four questions. He preceded each question with the assurance of how much he loved Negroes. Then he would add the word, "but"; he would then ask the real question. He did it the first time, the second time, the third time, and each time he said, "I am a little embarrassed because I don't think I am expressing what I really mean here. I promise you I have the deepest love for Negroes, but do you think they are ready for their rights?" I said, "What are you talking about? Every man is born with these rights. You know, I am waiting for the day when somebody in one of these meetings stands up—a white man—and asks me if such and such a group of whites are ready for their rights. If you should suggest that such and such a group of whites be denied their rights, this country would rise up and cut you down, and it should." Of course, the most obscene thing about that type of question is the very suggestion that some

men have a right to accord or to withhold such rights without which a man can't function. He sat down, and he popped right back up and said, "Now, please, Mr. Griffin, I am expressing myself very poorly. I don't mean to give you the kind of impression that I think I am giving you. I do have a very deep concern about these matters. I do have a very deep love for Negroes, but. . . ." I said, "Can I interrupt you at that point?" He said, "Of course." He was a very nice man. I said, "And would you be offended if I told you that when I was black we got sick of being loved by people like you?"

Thus, in this system we have the good thing, and then we have all the "buts." What the system told us was that we were citizens and as such we should defend our country against our enemies, and we should pay our taxes. At that time some of the "buts" were that we shouldn't vote, that we should not have equality of education or employment opportunities, and that we should not have equality of protection under the law. The list of "buts" is endless.

The most invisible and the most devastating "but" is that we should not have access to those culturally enriching elements that allow the human personality to grow and become fully functioning and fully manned. As I say, that is an oversimplification. The details vary from locality to locality. But it is this set of contradictions that we are referring to when we speak of the "system." Under this system, an extraordinary thing happens. This is not local; this happens all over the world. A community can go right on thinking they are being good, being kind, and never even perceive that until that system loses its contradictory aspects even an act of seeming goodness will be cruel in its effects on fellow human beings.

I began to foresee all this when I went into a drugstore in New Orleans where I had gone before as a white man. I remembered the young lady behind the cash register was a white lady. She was one of those that in the old days we called a "good white." She was a person of profound innate human courtesy. It is a thing that you couldn't simulate—it was authentic. I went in and she recognized nothing about me. I made a purchase, and to my great edification she treated me with profound courtesy such as she had shown me when I had been white. Black men experiencing this never forget it, because you are sort of wondering when it is going to hit. When it doesn't hit, your nerves begin to relax, and you feel something you never forget. I would have left, and I would have written a very good account of that meeting, except that I happened to have a physical need. It led me to ask a question that shed great light on how even kindness can be cruel in its effect on different groups, as long as we persist in maintaining that basic system of contradictions.

The question I asked this young lady was this: "Pardon me, but I am diabetic," which is the truth, and, "Could you tell me where would be the

closest place I could get water?" This young lady, immediately very concerned but ignoring the soda fountain to her right, leaned across the counter, and said, "Well, let's see. Where would be the nearest place?" I began to feel sick, not because of the diabetes, but because suddenly I am this intrinsic "other." She said, "I tell you what. I believe if you go out that door, and go up to that big double street up there, three blocks, then you can take a right." And she counted on her fingers to make certain to give me the right direction. She tried to be helpful; there is no question about that. "And if you go to such and such a street, that is fourteen blocks, I believe you will find a place."

Well, I am sure if anyone suggested to that very nice, that very kind young lady, that there was anything wrong in sending a man in need of water seventeen blocks when water was available three steps away, she would have been crushed. She thought she was doing a good thing. I try to give everyone the benefit of the doubt. I am sure that if I had said, "Pardon me, would you give me water?" she wouldn't have hesitated. She would have taken the three steps and given me that water, because she was that kind of person. But, you see, I didn't ask that question. I asked where was the nearest place I could find water, and this young lady, formed by this system, saw only the obvious. Here is a black man. Where is the nearest place I can direct him to find water? It wasn't the seventeen blocks, I assure you of that. That is not important. It is that you stood there, and you were immediately viewed as this intrinsic "other." And when you multiply that kind of thing thousands and thousands of times, you will begin to see that as black men we had to do things that changed every aspect of our life in a way that white men never, never begin to perceive.

Those "white only" signs are now gone. Yet recently I sat in a room with black men and ladies. Every person in that room was a Ph.D. except me, and they told me that today in Atlanta, Georgia, if a Ph.D. wants to take his car and go out of that city or go across the state, or go visit another town in that state, he still has to take along his sandwiches. He still doesn't know if, when hunger and thirst arrive, he is going to be able to satisfy those needs without going through a kind of torment of doubts. A point that I think is tremendously important is that this has got nothing to do with how much one has learned, how much one has worked, or how much one has "lifted himself up by his bootstraps." I am not understressing the importance of education, but we know that the Jewish minority was the most educated minority in the history of mankind. As a friend of mine said, "If we got rid of all the black people in this country tomorrow, look out for the Jews."

This was the kind of thing that faced us. It faces us in front of places that never had thought of putting up a "white only" sign. This is the important

thing. We stood in front of doors through which men had to pass in order to be men, in order to function as men. One day I stood in front of the public library in Jackson, Mississippi. I stood there dressed as I am here. I knew that beyond those doors there were books, there was knowledge, and there was learning. I remembered the combined voices of concerned white men telling me to work, to struggle, to pick myself up by my bootstraps, to get myself an education. I reflected on another thing that is intimate to black men. I knew that every time I spent a dollar in that state, that I bought a dollar's worth of goods, I paid my four cents sales tax. That year the sales tax made up 48 per cent of that state's income. A portion of it went to support that public library. I stood there in front of those doors. I knew that my black tax dollars were involved in this. I knew that the white man says, "Pick yourself up by your bootstraps." I knew that beyond those doors there are books, there is learning. And I am told, "Don't you dare go in there! You will be driven out by a policedog chewing on your leg!" That same thing held true in front of a public library in Anderson, Alabama. You see, this begins to be maddening because what a black man has heard constantly has been the advice of sincere whites that he lift himself up. And every time he found a loophole through which he might do it, he found it plugged. At that library in Anderson, Alabama, I was told, "Don't you dare go in there, or you will risk being chain-whipped as two black ministers were who insisted on going in."

There has never been a "white only" sign that I have ever seen above the door of any church. Yet I have stood in front of the doors of churches, even churches of my own denomination, and I was driven out. I even went to two churches where a year before I had been on lecture tour, where I had signed autographs, where I had been surrounded by a kind of marvelous warmth and hospitality and seeming love. When I had finished, the men came up and patted me on the back and said, "It has been a great experience hearing you, Mr. Griffin. Please, if you ever get back in this area, do come and see us." They didn't anticipate, and I didn't anticipate, that when I would be back in that area I would be altered in pigment; but I returned dressed as I am here. The very same men, the same kind of men who had sent me away with such a warmth a year before, saw a black man walking up that sidewalk. They came out and planted themselves in front of the doors to protect the house of God from my contaminating presence. Since you always blame the victim, they spoke to me in this kind of language; they said: "What are you trying to do? You get yourself over to that nigger church where you belong. You cut this foolishness out right now!" If you want to have a skull-cracking experience, stand outside the door of a church from which you have just been thus driven, and listen while inside men, women, and children raise their voices in hymns. I will never forget

the very first time that happened to me. The hymn that was being sung inside was called, "Walking in the Paths of Jesus." And you begin to wonder who has lost his mind in this thing. This happened again, again, and again.

So in our homes at night we would talk, and we would talk incessantly. In those days we were not talking hatred of the white. No, believe me, we weren't. We would talk, and we would try to understand the white man. We would say, "How can he fail to see that by his inability to understand this system for what it is, to repudiate its contradictions, it has contaminated even his highest institutions, his places of learning, his schools, his libraries, and his places of healing?" Read the 1967 Civil Rights Commission Report on desegregation of medical facilities—you won't believe it.

This is the "system" as the black man sees it. It has meant standing always as this intrinsic "other" in front of doors that men don't want to keep closed. The cumulative effect of this, again if I may oversimplify, is that this system, in a thousand ways that we whites never perceive, never even dream of, ends up creating the destruction of the black male. It does this in three essential ways. In the first place, it prevents us as men from functioning in ways that a man has to function in order to have any sense of self-respect. Part of that system lies in the fact that the black man was not the most stable income-earning member of his family. The black wife, the black mother, was always employable. If he had a job, the black man could not hold it with dignity, because in those days every time he went out in the morning to go to work, he went out saying this kind of thing: "Now I have to go put on that white man's mask and grin, grin, grin." While on the job when the white man decides to bait you—although he may not even know he is baiting you—if you don't give him back a grin and your mountain of yes's, suddenly you have become what is called a "bad Negro." You have become insolent, arrogant—black men know the history of that. All somebody has to do is say you have an insolent, arrogant Negro, so get rid of him. So the system has prevented the black male from being the breadwinner, submitted him to this humiliation and to the knowledge that a black lady, a black wife, a black mother, was the more stable income earner.

Secondly, it is necessary for man to feel that he is the protector of his women. I am not even going to try to begin to penetrate this incredible stream, except to reiterate that 75 per cent of the black men in this land have white antecedents. You can hardly be in a family where this is not fairly close at hand. I would like to cite two examples. One lady I know discovered when she was eight years old that she wasn't living with her parents. Shortly after her birth her mother was raped by three white men, and her head was held under the water of a tank until she drowned. When her father cried out in anguish, he disappeared and was never seen again. An-

other is a lady from Atlanta, Georgia. Talking to her not long ago I said, "You are a marvelous speaker." She answered, "I am not a marvelous speaker. I just happen to have the best opening line in the history of the lecture platform." I said, "Well, what is it?" She said, "I am going to talk to three hundred white Presbyterian ladies this afternoon. Why don't you come and listen?" So I went. This superbly groomed black lady stood before them and said, "Ladies, you are looking on the product of a white man's rape upon my mother." I had to agree—that was the most startling opening line I had ever heard.

But the point I want to make is something we haven't faced. The black man who tries to protect his woman could get beaten up, could get killed, could never be seen again. He knows that his wife or daughter is going to be insulted, but he could not be her protector.

Finally, what a man has to do to bear himself as a man, as the father of his children, is to be able to see a way of making it better for those children, or better for himself. In these three areas, you see, men are denied manhood. There was a huge migration out of these conditions into the cities, into the ghettos, by men subject to this kind of dehumanizing pattern. These men, who were driven out, came flooding into the ghettos of Cleveland, Chicago, and Watts. They found that they were hopelessly handicapped. They found that the same old patterns held there and that they were restricted to black enclaves. Those patterns continued to hold. The black man dreamed of the day when justice would come. He dreamed of the day when this would become a truly integrated society, when this country would stand up to its promises equally to all of its citizens. A few short years back the black man felt that the blame for the failure to achieve true integration in this country was his. Black men generally believed that most good whites were in nonsouthern states, and most bad whites were in the South. Strangely enough, one of the ironies of Martin Luther King's work was that after he was so praised for his work in the South by northerners he came out of the South and, with his genius for confrontation, encountered exactly the same opposition in communities that had praised him for what he had done in the South.

So black men then came to an extremely reluctant, steamrolling conclusion that the white man was not going to cease his opposition. What one must do is accept the reality of the white-imposed separation and find the genius for organization that will allow men to take a huge disadvantage and turn it into a huge advantage. There developed a belief that you must give up on the white man and go it this other way. Then black men, black thinkers, began to analyze the structures of the past. They analyzed all these things I have been talking to you about. They began to use terms like "fragmental individualism." They said, "We have been kept weak by

this dream which was never realized." They said, "A part of the fragmental individualism—and remember, we're not blaming the white man—is in part blamed on the system." A part of this system had to do with fragmental individualism which virtually told the black man that the only way he could make it was by separating himself more and more from his blackness, by becoming more and more the white man's black man, by trying to be whiter and whiter and whiter. Men realize that this is old stuff to black men. Men began to realize quickly that this was a terrible weakness and began to counter with a deep emphasis on the brothers and the sisters. Men began to realize that the black child never had and will not have a chance so long as that black child goes to school and learns by the time he's six or seven years old that every hero in all of history has been white, destroying the black image, male images as men and as heroes. We are having such terrible turmoil in the schools today because black parents don't want this any more. Black parents want that black male child to grow up with an image of dignity. So when I speak in black schools today I deemphasize even my own presence, and I speak about the black heroes.

The realization has come that one has to take great weaknesses and turn them into strength. The realization has come, for example, which has not been clear to the white community, that black men earn money, go home, spend money in a chain store in the ghetto that does not hire black personnel above the level of the clerk or the custodian and then see the profits from that store taken to white banks, which discriminate in small business loans and home loans. Previously, when a black man was in business, black persons would not self-segregate. They would say, "No, we're not going to do this. We're fighting for this integration thing, and we're not going to self-segregate." Then there was a turning point in this kind of support. Black men went to chain stores, in Chicago for example, and said, "We are now united. If you want that store down on the South Side to sell another lettuce leaf, you will hire black personnel, and you will hire it up to the management level. Furthermore, you will bank the profits in a black bank." A bank on the South Side of Chicago in three months went from assets of five million to assets of twenty-two million.

Some Closing Thoughts

This is the present state of affairs. This is why it is liable to be far more difficult today to achieve true integration. As I say, there is a time lapse. We tend now to be working at levels that made sense in the black community five years ago. But what we must realize is that men can give their confidence once, but if it is betrayed it is very difficult to give it a second time. If it is given the second time and betrayed, it is very, very difficult to give it a third time. What we have to realize is that because of a combina-

tion of all of these and many other factors, black men have run out of options. I know this is extremely painful to white men who don't want any of this, who never did want any of this. Such men say to me constantly, "What do I do wrong? We're really making an effort. I find that the more I try to be open, the more I try to be understanding, the more I try to be reassuring, the more I am meeting a stone wall of distrust and contradiction." I tell such men, "It may be that you are doing nothing wrong yourself, but what is very difficult to realize is that in the black man's past there have been too many people who looked like you, who dressed like you, who smiled like you, who spoke like you, and who then at some level, without realizing it and without intending to, deceived."

This is where we are today. I've only scratched the surface, but I hope if one thing comes out of this it is the realization that in authentic communications we're involved with three basic impediments. There is, first the impediment of what we call the double monologue. This is where men are speaking without listening. There is what we call the dialogue of the deaf where we are speaking and using the same words but with profoundly different meanings. In addition, there is the profoundest problem of all—the problem of a prior distrust. One of the tragic things about this, which was certainly borne out in my experience as a black man, is that our deepest deception was the kind of a man we thought was the good white. What we used to mean by the good white was that man in the community who wasn't in any way involved in all this. He told us that when the day came he was going to stand up for justice and truth. Then the days did come—Little Rock, Clinton, Jacksonville, Tampa, Mansfield—and we heard nothing but silence from him. So there is a profound prior distrust that we have to recognize before we can hope to finally believe that we are communicating at an authentic level.

Finally, there's this—which is perhaps the most difficult of all; a great philosopher who died this last week, said that before we can truly and authentically dialogue with one another in depth and without any impediments, we have to first open ourselves to the other. I have always told him that it's not enough; it doesn't go far enough. I find that we can intellectually liberate ourselves from all these things, but at the emotional level we tend to carry that profound conviction of the idea of the intrinsic "other." We must first intellectually liberate ourselves from this. Secondly, we must find some way of coming to an emotional recognition of the truth of the fact that there isn't any such thing as an intrinsic "other." There are intrinsic others hidden behind racial and ethnic mythology. We must come down to something much more basic, beneath concepts of cultures and subcultures which are valid and legitimate, to the fact that every man who lives and breathes faces certain fundamental problems of living, of suffer-

ing, of fulfilling human aspirations, and of dying. These are the basic things. I really believe that today before we can trust ourselves and our communications, we have to come to that level which will finally persuade us that this intrinsic "other" isn't "other" at all—it is me. Then I believe that if we can get rid of the idea that fellow human beings, who are products of cultural differences, are underdeveloped versions of ourselves, we can begin to go a long way.

What I have tried to do is answer, in a very scattered way, the kind of things that seem to be bewildering men of good will today. I am just puting that before you for what it is worth, and I hope that you will help in the solution of these terrible problems in a way that won't delude us into thinking that we are doing something that to the black man is not perceived as something. In other words, I have tried to put you in another man's mind, at least near another man's mind.

Finally, there is one great warning that I would like to give you. I constantly find men who stand up and tell me that a Negro told him this or that. A part of this whole idea, the intrinsic "other," is the suggestion that black men are monolithic in thought and reaction. When such a man tells me this, I say, "Go out and ask ten more black men and you will probably get eleven different versions." So I warn you most particularly to keep the idea in mind that there is an enormous diversity in the black community, just as there is in every other community, and that we must not make the mistake of thinking that this is a monolithic problem with a monolithic answer.